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# Corzine pushes for tough Oyster Creek renewal rules

## Attack vulnerability, escape plans would be considered

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BY [NICHOLAS CLUNN](#)  
STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON — The Oyster Creek nuclear power plant in Lacey, N.J., would be required to meet tougher standards than any other reactor in the United States seeking to renew its operating license, under legislation introduced Tuesday by Sen. Jon S. Corzine, D-N.J.

The bill would order the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission to consider the plant's vulnerability to a terrorist attack, its evacuation plans for nearby towns in case of an emergency, and other issues excluded from the existing license-renewal process.

It also would mandate the National Academy of Sciences, an independent advisory group, to assess Oyster Creek and forward its recommendations to the NRC and Congress.

Corzine's amendment comes as plant owner AmerGen prepares to apply for a license renewal, which would allow the reactor to stay open for another 20 years beyond the expiration of its initial 40-year license in 2009. The reactor likely would close without a renewal.

The bill follows stiff criticisms lodged against Corzine by state environmentalists and critics of Oyster Creek's renewal plans, who have called on the Democratic candidate for governor to take a stand on the future of the longest-running reactor in the country.

Brick Mayor Joseph C. Scarpelli, who petitioned the NRC to strengthen its rules for license renewal last week, regarded the bill as "well thought out" and said it represented Corzine taking a lead role in ensuring the plant's safety.

"I think the bill takes into account everything we have discussed," Scarpelli said. "It's fair to the nuclear power industry and to the public."

### Clarifies his position

During an interview Tuesday, Corzine repeated assertions, made during a campaign stop in Toms River on July 3, that he was inclined to support a license renewal but that a thorough study of the 35-year-old reactor by the academy is prudent.

"If they came back and said the plant's unsafe, I wouldn't ask for a renewal at all," he said. "Shooting from the hip on this stuff is not really very smart."

But Corzine also said he recognized the benefits of atomic energy in helping reduce the country's reliance on fossil fuels.

"Anyone who truly cares about the environment knows we have to do something about global warming,

### CORZINE BILL

It would require federal regulators considering a license renewal for the Oyster Creek nuclear power plant to consider the following factors in addition to what the existing rules call for: Vulnerability to a terrorist attack

Evacuation plans

Size of the surrounding population

Ability to store nuclear waste

Safety and security record

Impact of a nuclear accident

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which for a shore-based environment is an absolute super-risk," he said.

The Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating Station Act of 2005 would also require the NRC to consider the reactor's ability to store nuclear waste safely, the plant's safety and security record, the growth of the surrounding population and the impact of a radioactive release.

About 131,000 people live within 10 miles of the plant, according to U.S. Census figures, which do not take into account the area's summer visitors. Within 50 miles, there are about 4.5 million people, including some in Pennsylvania and New York.

Regulators are responsible for evaluating a reactor's potential impact on the environment and whether a plant owner could deal with age-related degradation during an extended operating period, according to the NRC.

Evacuation plans, terrorist attacks and spent fuel storage are issues federal regulators and plant owners monitor on a regular basis outside the license renewal process, said Gina Scala, a spokeswoman for Oyster Creek.

She said the existing rules for license renewals are adequate, though Oyster Creek would be able to stand up to the conditions proposed in the bill. The plant's emergency response plan is an issue that has received regular attention from AmerGen officials, she said.

"It's a living document," Scala said. "It is constantly being reviewed and tested."

### Similar bill in House

Corzine's bill is similar to legislation introduced by Rep. H. James Saxton, R-N.J., which is now in a House subcommittee.

The only difference is a measure in Corzine's bill that calls on the academy to recommend an optimal period in which Oyster Creek and plants of similar design could safely operate but fails to spell out which plants would be covered.

Corzine's attempt to strengthen the rules governing the license renewal process is one of several similar efforts.

On Thursday, Scarpelli and members from several state environmental advocacy groups announced that they would petition regulators to increase the number of factors they consider in renewal applications.

Andrew J. Spano, county executive in Westchester County, N.Y., submitted a similar petition in May. Spano has been critical of the Indian Point nuclear power plant, about 24 miles north of New York City.

Jeff Tittel, executive director of the Sierra Club's New Jersey chapter, said he supports the Corzine legislation but hopes the lawmaker would oppose a renewal for Oyster Creek if the bill dies.

He said Corzine introduced the bill to solidify his views on the reactor, not to repair his image with environmentalists.

"We're a firm believer in officials clarifying their positions, and I think that's what he did," Tittel said.

*Gannett News Service reporter Ledyard King contributed to this story. Nicholas Clunn: (609) 978-4597 or [nclunn@app.com](mailto:nclunn@app.com)*

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